

# SEED Study to Explore Early Development

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*This is a semi-annual newsletter of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded Study to Explore Early Development (SEED). The purpose of this newsletter is to inform the public of the study's progress.*

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## Healthy Eating and Being Active

You've probably read about it in newspapers and seen it on the news: in the United States, the number of children and teens who are obese is too high. You may wonder why doctors and scientists are troubled by this. As parents, you may also ask: What steps can we take to help prevent obesity in our children? In this edition, we share answers to some of the questions you may have and provide tips to help you keep your family healthy.

### Why is childhood obesity considered a health problem?

Doctors and scientists are concerned about the rise of obesity in children and youth because obesity may lead to health problems in children such as heart disease risk factors, type 2 diabetes, and asthma. Obese children and adolescents may also be at risk for weight-related health problems in adulthood.

### What is obesity?

Obesity means having excess body fat. Obesity can increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems.

### What can I do as a parent or guardian to help prevent childhood overweight and obesity?

#### Encourage healthy eating habits.

To help your children and family develop healthy eating habits:

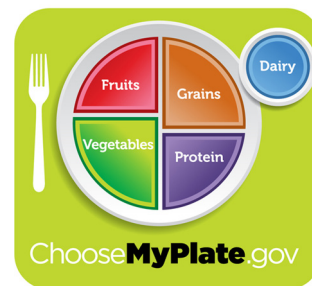
- Provide plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain products.
- Include low-fat or non-fat milk or dairy products.
- Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, lentils, and beans for protein.
- Serve reasonably sized portions.
- Limit sugar-sweetened beverages. Water can be a good substitute.
- Limit consumption of foods with added sugar or saturated fat.

For more information about healthy eating, visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

Note: Do not place children or teens on a weight loss diet without first talking with their doctor.

#### Help kids stay active

Remember that children imitate adults. Start adding physical activity to your own daily routine and encourage your child to join you.



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Some examples of physical activity include:

- Brisk walking
- Playing tag
- Jumping rope
- Playing soccer
- Swimming
- Dancing

Visit [www.letsmove.gov](http://www.letsmove.gov) for more ideas on helping kids to be active.



### Reduce the amount of time your child is inactive

In addition to encouraging physical activity, help children avoid too much time sitting or being inactive. Although quiet time for reading and homework is fine, limit the time your children watch television, play video games, or surf the web to no more than 2 hours per day. Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children 2 or younger do not watch television. Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities to do with family members or on their own that simply involve more activity.

Visit [www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html) for more information on physical activity for adults and children.

### The International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR)

In May 2014, SEED researchers gathered in Atlanta, GA with about 1,700 other participants at the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR). The International Society for Autism Research organizes IMFAR and describes it as an annual scientific meeting to share new progress among scientists and their trainees from around the world. This year, SEED researchers gave six presentations at IMFAR on topics including genetic and environmental risk factors

for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and how genes might relate to the different types of ASD. Look for future editions of the SEED newsletter in which we will explain the findings on these and other topics.

Thanks to all of you who gave your time and effort to participate in SEED. You are the most important part of this research. Highlighting SEED at conferences like IMFAR ensures that SEED families are making a difference in research around the world!

## HIGHLIGHTS OF SEED PROGRESS



### SEED 2 is growing!

The SEED 2 sites started inviting families to take part in the study in the summer of 2012. So far, 2,194 families have enrolled. Increasing the number of families enrolled in SEED allows us to get an even better picture of what puts children at risk of developing an autism spectrum disorder. Thank you SEED families!

Watch for our next newsletter to see how SEED grows or visit [www.cdc.gov/seed](http://www.cdc.gov/seed) to see all the editions of the SEED newsletter.

SEED 1 2,700 families SEED 2 2,194 families



The graphic shows SEED 2 progress as of July 1, 2014.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: D.J.'S STORY



D.J. Svoboda was diagnosed at age 3 with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). He had speech delays and issues with his fine motor skills. Even holding a pencil was difficult for him. Today, D.J. is a dynamic, motivational public speaker, accomplished artist and author with three books: *My Imagiville*, *The Mupperezmo* and *The Rainbow*, and *The*

*Inspirations of Imagiville*. D.J. shared with us some thoughts about his experiences of living with ASD and how he overcame the challenges of being bullied.

### ***SEED: For you, what is most challenging about living with autism?***

**D.J.:** Sometimes people do not understand autism and they judge me when I have a meltdown. People sometimes try to make me fit into their world when I have my own world. [It's also challenging] when I try to explain something and I can't. I get frustrated when things such as my sensory issues and my routine are very, very important to me and other people do not take them seriously.

### ***SEED: What are your greatest strengths?***

**D.J.:** My ability to draw and to be a motivational speaker at conferences and events, my compassion for those dealing with autism, and my ability to connect with them and give encouragement, hope and confidence.

### ***SEED: You shared that growing up you were teased and bullied. How did you deal with those challenges?***

**D.J.:** I got lots of great support from my family and friends and I was always taught that I was very special just the way I am and to always believe in myself. My mom taught me that when people bully it is because they do not understand autism.

### ***SEED: What advice do you have for parents of children who have ASD?***

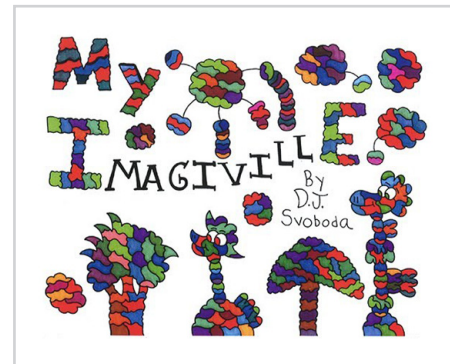
**D.J.:** To love them unconditionally. One thing that my mom always tells parents when we speak is that she had to learn not to try to fit me into her world but to adjust her world to accommodate my autism. Never

give up on them because you never know what they are capable of doing. I had a hard time holding a pen or pencil and I also had speech delays but today I am an artist and motivational speaker!

### ***SEED: What do you hope to teach people through your art and public speaking?***

**D.J.:** I hope to teach others to believe in themselves and to give them confidence, encouragement, hope, and determination. They are very special and wonderful the way they are. Dream big, believe big AND expect big. [I also hope to teach] acceptance for those with autism and that amazing, awesome, wonderful and very incredible things are very possible every day.

*Cover of D.J.'s book My Imagiville.*



*The negative experiences of being bullied inspired D.J. to create the land of Imagiville, a safe place in his imagination where everyone is treated kindly and accepted just the way they are.*



*The Mupperezmo, affectionately known as the "Mupp" is a dragon-like character who turns his head upside-down to see the world from a different point of view.*



## SITE SNAPSHOT: NORTH CAROLINA

The North Carolina SEED site is located at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill. Recently, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded a three-year State Implementation Grant to UNC. This grant is a statewide effort to improve services for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It will bring together key university departments and state agencies to work on the following goals

- Lower the age by which providers screen children for ASD and other developmental problems
- Lower the age by which providers offer needed early intervention services
- Look at ways to increase access to family-centered care
- Increase public and provider awareness of signs and symptoms of ASD and other developmental problems
- Assess family's needs for, and barriers to, coordinated care across the state.

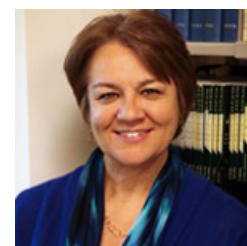
Dr. Stephen Hooper, Associate Dean and Chair of the UNC Department of Allied Health Sciences, directs this State Implementation Grant along with Dr. Rebecca Pretzel, Co-Principal Investigator. Dr. Pretzel said, "The state of North Carolina is fortunate to have a number of service systems

in place to address the needs of young children with developmental disabilities and their families. We are confident that this new funding will enhance current efforts and facilitate additional improvements in the coordination of state services."

Multiple SEED investigators are partners on the State Implementation Grant, including:

Dr. Julie Daniels, NC-SEED Principal Investigator, Dr. Kathleen Thomas, Co-investigator, and Dr. Pretzel, Co-investigator. Collaborating UNC Departments include AHEC TEACCH Program, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, the Gillings School of Global Public Health, the School of Social Work, and the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research. State agency partners include the Autism Society of NC, North Carolina's Infant-Toddler Program, and the NC Department of Public Instruction pre-kindergarten programs.

For more information about the ASD State Implementation Grant, contact Dr. Stephen Hooper ([Stephen\\_Hooper@med.unc.edu](mailto:Stephen_Hooper@med.unc.edu)) or Dr. Rebecca Edmondson Pretzel ([Becky.Edmondson@cidd.unc.edu](mailto:Becky.Edmondson@cidd.unc.edu)).



*Dr. Rebecca Pretzel,  
Co-Principal Investigator,  
North Carolina ASD State  
Implementation Grant*



**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention**  
National Center on Birth Defects  
and Developmental Disabilities

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Center for Autism and  
Developmental Disabilities  
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